

Thirty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time

By: Rev. Christopher Weekly, S.J.

If you've prayed with the weekday readings in recent days, or even the Sunday mass readings in recent weeks, then you know we're leaning rather strongly into a major theme: It's the end time, the apocalypse, and maybe it's because I'm an old Protestant but I love this time of year, when the scriptures are loaded with prophecies of the second coming of Christ! In the worlds of an old R. E. M. song (that will surely date me), "It's the end of the world as we know it . . . and I feel fine."

I love the scriptures of this liturgical season because of their power to re-orient our lives, their power to help us point the compass of our lives toward true north once again.

The gospel opens with an important comment about what gets us lost on our faith journey, how it is we wander off the sure path: "Some people were speaking about how the temple was adorned with beautiful stones," Luke says, and this immediately follows upon Jesus telling his disciples to beware, beware the pride, hypocrisy and greed of the Scribes who are milling around that lovely temple. There is not one of these costly stones that will not be torn down! It's similar caution that the Prophet Malachi gives in our first reading, saying that the proud of heart, those who, in their arrogance think they themselves set themselves free . . . these will be burned like stubble in a field! This is wonderful news! This is Good News!

This is Good News, in the first place, because it reminds us that our God is on the side of justice and holiness, and will shine the healing rays of justice, like sunlight, on those who walk in humility, those who know God alone is the builder of the temples that last, those who are grateful to the One who has set us free. But it's Good News in a very practical sense, as well, because these scriptures awaken us, help us re-gain possession of the direction and purpose of our lives, just as some of our spiritual guides have done over the centuries.

For instance, in the Spiritual Exercises, St. Ignatius Loyola proposes an imaginative series of meditations to retreatants who are trying to discern a life choice, a vocation, a direction for living. Ignatius says "consider as if you were at the point of death," or, alternately, "imagine in what condition you will find yourself on judgment day." When we picture ourselves at the end of our lives, Ignatius suggest, we gain a clarity about how we wish we could have lived, a clarity about how we ought to live now, and the choices that we

need to make at key junctures in the time that remains. Friends, in a similar vein today, our scriptures turn us toward our own death and judgment, not to alarm us, but to invite us to see more clearly how we should live now, how we Christians should live in the time before the end of our days.

In the first place, Jesus cautions us not to be deceived . . . and not to be afraid. Jesus tells us not to be deceived by some who will come in his name, but are enamored of their of their own gospel of prosperity and self adulation, rather than the God who set them free. And if Jesus were here in our present time, in these times of trial, I imagine him saying something like this: We should not be afraid to be living in times of high oil prices, with alarming threats of global warming, and unending cycles of war and terrorism that face us. In times of conflict and division, we Christians should be mindful of our fundamental belief: In times of conflict and division, we have a chance to give witness to the core of our faith—Our trust in a God who raised Christ from death to life, our confidence in the God who rescued Israel from slavery, and set them free from all that had held them bound.

Friends, it is this willingness to testify to our faith in time of trial that can re-orient our lives to God, our true north star, the one who is always moving us from slavery to freedom, always shifting us from death to new life.

In fact, without this remembrance, scripture attests. We become, at the very least, the kind of fractious busy-bodies and gossips that St. Paul chastises in his letter to the Thessalonians. And at our worst, forgetting what God has done for us in Christ, we think it is our own power and strength that has given us wealth, built beautiful temples. But these stones (even these stones at St. Joseph that we are trying to strengthen against earthquakes!) will be torn down on the last day, and a day is coming, blazing like an oven, when all our pride will be burned away like stubble. This is Good News . . . For as St. Ignatius suggest, and as these scriptures invite, if we can imagine ourselves on our deathbed, or at the last judgment, then we are able to re-align our priorities according to the God of Jesus Christ. And then consolation will follow, the consolation of knowing that the "sun of righteousness shall rise for us, with healing in its wings" - Healing light that will help us patiently endure these times of trial so that when this world as we know it does come to and end, we will feel fine . . . We will feel fine, and be able to face the sun of God's justice in full possession of the life given to us by our Creator!

READINGS OF THE WEEK

Malachi 3:19-20

2 Thessalonians 3:7-12

Luke 21:5-19

November 17, 2013

靈 修 生 活

正 義 與 慈 愛 相 擁

曾 慶 導 神 父

現代神學界的一個錯誤思潮是：「天主是不會發怒的，人沒有罪，死後也沒有審判，籍著一個宇宙性的(不是在歷史上出現的，故無須十字架)基督(Cosmic Christ)，人人都會被帶進天堂裡。」這些看似大度量 and 開放的態度，不是聖經裡的啟示，因此不是真正的福音；不但不是福音，還會對教會生活和福傳帶來很深的負面影響。如果所有的人一定都會上天堂，包括毫無悔意的強姦犯和受害者都一樣，還有什麼天理？鼓吹這種「和稀泥」歪理的人應從今天的讀經一有所覺悟：在那世界的終結，所有驕傲的人和作惡的人都要成為麥稈，在冒火焰的爐子燒盡；但為敬畏天主的人，他們會感受到正義的太陽的溫暖和光明的救恩！天主不是昏庸的天主，「祂要親自審判大地乾坤，以正義審判普世人羣，以公平治理天下萬民(答唱詠)。聖經不知有多少章節記載了天主是會發怒，天主的發怒表現出祂對受壓迫者的慈愛，也表現出聖潔的天主與罪惡是誓不兩立的。所有這類讀經對作惡的人是一個警告(趕快回頭改過，則善莫大焉)；對敬畏主名的人，是在迫害中的一個鼓勵和希望。

有人說，天主不能也不會受制於自己訂立的「正義」，而會讓自己的慈憫取代正義。這種把正義和慈憫對立起來，有一就不能有二的不對。天主是正義的，但同時又是慈憫的；天主是慈憫的，但同時又是正義的。這在天主子自願為人類承擔罪的後果---痛苦和死亡的行動上表現出來：天主子用對人的愛的自我犧牲來滿全正義的要求！「仁愛和忠信必彼此相迎，正義與和平必彼此相親」(詠八五 11)。天主的正義和慈憫是一體兩面，天主的慈憫是不會違反正義的。天主不會自我矛盾。同樣在這鼓勵和希望的脈絡裡，主耶穌今天給我們「末世性」的教訓：罪惡勢力不論多麼猖狂，「你們只要堅忍到底，就可以保全你們的生命。」當然，主耶穌這裡說的生命是「靈魂的生命」。被反基督的人殺害肉身不等於喪失生命，靈魂的永生保證肉身的復活和永生。

今天福音裡的預言真的會發生嗎？不是太可怕了嗎？但主耶穌沒法講得動聽一點，因為跟隨基督的基督徒所遭遇的，都是主耶穌曾遭遇過的。今天的預言雖有「末世」的意味，但並非在末世才會發生。遠的不說，如羅馬帝國對基督徒長達三百年的殘酷迫害，近的如在共產極權下的教會，就一字不差地印證了今天主耶穌所說的預言。跟隨基督的人要背十字架，但「主！唯獨祢有永生的話，不跟隨祢，我們跟隨誰呢？」(若六 68)。天主會給我們足夠的力量去背十字架的。

不單教會外有共產主義或法西斯主義等標榜自己是人民的救主，教會內也出現假基督來分列基督的奧體，也有削弱、甚至不提耶穌基督的「新靈修方法」和「新靈修大師」。對所有這些「救主」、「改革者」或「新大師們」，主耶穌一向告誡說：「不要跟隨他們！」因為主耶穌不是給世界帶來和平而是分裂(瑪十 34-36)，基督奧體和反基督勢力的鬥爭是必然上演的。主耶穌就因堅持自己是能赦罪的默西亞，而叫猶太人受不了並大聲叫嚷：「釘死他！」今天，還要堅持說耶穌基督是「唯一中保，唯一救主」的基督徒也可能會被世界「釘死」，因為他們不願與壞人同流合污而遭受排擠打擊，或因為仗義執言而被鬥被關，這樣的例子太多了！

問題是怎樣在極端困難中「堅忍到底」？主耶穌說過：「凡在小事上忠信的，在大事上也忠信；在小事上不義的，在大事上也不義」(路十六 10)。我們每天都有很多「小」的機會鍛鍊我們的忠信，鍛鍊我們抵抗誘惑的力量。就如一個時常鍛鍊身體的人對疾病有較強的抵抗力，靈魂的抵抗力可以從我們日常的克苦、祈禱(特別是默想聖經)和參與聖事，特別是聖體聖事與和好聖事中獲得。現在比較少提及「克苦」，但它對靈修是必不可缺的操練。克苦其實就是「律己」的鍛鍊。有位聖人說：「在許可的事上不會節制的人，在不許可的事上也不會節制。」無法通過小考驗的人，當大的考驗來臨時也很難及格過關。

我們相信基督會再來，那時「義人要在他們父的國裡，發光如同太陽」(瑪十三 43)。但當我們「期待永生的幸福，和救主耶穌的來臨」時，我們不能像今天保祿宗徒所告誡的那些得撒洛尼人一樣，以為主快來了，就遊手好閒吃閒飯，什麼也不做；而應像勤勞工作等待家主回來的忠僕(瑪廿四 45，廿五 14-30)，盡力利用我們的塔冷通去建立更有人性、更基督化的世界。

梵二〈教會在現代世界牧職憲章〉中的一段話值得我們反省：「對大地及人類終窮的時刻，我們一無所知，亦不知萬物將如何改變。但為罪惡所玷污的世界面目，必將逝去。天主告訴我們，祂將為我們準備一個正義常存其內的新的住所、新的天地，其幸福將要滿足並超出人心所能想到的一切和平的願望……但期待新天新地的希望，不僅不應削弱，而且應增進我們建設此世的心火。因為新的人類大家庭的雛形，是滋長發育在今世的……」(39 號)

我們今天所做的一切，有著永恆的意義，用普通的話來說，就是：「善有善報，惡有惡報」。我們基督徒不希望有惡人存